

FROM THE PASTOR'S



26th Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 30, 2007 C

DIVES (THE RICH MAN) ENDED UP IN HELL FOR FAILING TO SHARE WITH THE POOR. COULD THIS HAPPEN TO US?

Today's parable would have been a shocker for Jesus' audience who believed wealth was a sign of God's blessing and poverty, a sign one had lost favor with God. The parable was intended to be a *HUGE WAKE UP CALL* for Jesus' audience and for us of our responsibility to share our blessings with the poor. In a very real sense, the Gospel is another stewardship Gospel about the way we handle money and material blessings. In this parable, Jesus clearly states that lack of action on behalf of the poor will land us in hell.

I am sure that Dives never believed that his lack of action towards Lazarus and other poor people would land him in hell. After all, he was probably a good and kind man to his family and friends and he wasn't mean to Lazarus. He just ignored him. He didn't think that his indifference to Lazarus would be sufficient to have him barred from heaven.

When we think of the list of sins that would land us in hell, I wonder how many of us would include "sins against the poor" on our list.

When we as a *nation, church, and individually* place ourselves in the context of our *global* family we would have to say that we are Dives or the Rich Man and countries like Haiti are Lazarus outside our gate. The question is "how are we responding? Are we acting on behalf of the poor or are we indifferent to the poor? Or worse still, are we part of a system that all too often sucks the life out of the poor and treats them like beggars and slave labor.

The True Cost of Low Prices - The Violence of Globalization

This past summer I read a book with the above title by Vincent Gallagher. It was an eye-opener. Regarding U.S. donations to the poor, Gallagher writes:

After the Second World War, we gave 2.79 percent of our Gross National Income (GNI) to rebuild Europe. By 1960, we were giving 0.52 percent of our GNI in foreign aid. By 2004, it was 0.16 percent. This puts the United States next to last on the list of developed countries and their contributions of humanitarian aid to poor countries, according to data published by the Organization of Economic cooperation and Development.

On the other hand, Gallagher notes individual Americans are super generous when it comes to responding to disasters like Katrina, earthquakes etc.

The Issue of Outsourcing our Labor to Poor Countries

In the past ten years or so, more and more companies take their work to poor countries. Why? Gallagher notes two reasons:

- *To avoid compliance with the protection laws the U.S. has built into our system.*
- *To get work done for much lower prices.*

The following are some of the things that make labor in this country much higher than in poor countries:

- *Child labor laws*
- *Minimum wage laws*
- *Occupational safety and health laws*
- *Environmental protection laws*
- *The right to organize labor unions*
- *Equal pay for men and women*
- *Time and a half for overtime (over forty hours a week)*
- *Age discrimination laws*
- *Americans with Disabilities Act*
- *Civil rights protection for race and creed*
- *Worker's compensation laws*
- *Unemployment benefits*
- *Social Security disability benefits*

To avoid having to deal with the above laws, which as a nation we should be very proud of, companies take their work to countries where workers are treated like 'slaves, work in terrible conditions and have no protection.' Gallagher writes:

The National Labor Committee has played a major role in bringing attention to the exploitation of poor workers. The committee is a coalition of labor unions, religious organizations, students, human rights activists, civil rights activists, women's organizations, and community organizations who believe that worker rights are fundamental human rights.

The following are some examples of what the national Labor Committee found as a result of their research. It is not a pretty picture.

Wal-Mart. *When you purchase a toy at Wal-Mart, do you ever imagine teenage women in China working from 7:30 am to 2 am, eighteen and a half hours a day, seven days a week, in 104 degree temperatures, handling toxic*

chemicals with their bare hands, and paid as little as thirteen cents an hour? One woman described how she felt at the end of her shift at 2 am - her vision blurred, eyes watery, sick to her stomach, her back aching, her fingers cut and bleeding from the sharp metal edges of the die-cast toy cars she had painted for Mattel.

In the Chun Shi factory in China, Wal-Mart suppliers were forced to work from 7 am to 11 pm, sixteen hours a day, thirty days a month, for an average wage of just three cents an hour! And they were the “lucky ones.” Forty-six percent of the workers were held as indentured servants and actually owed the company money. When workers asked for their rights, they were beaten, and eight hundred were fired.

Wal-Mart responded by claiming that they had never heard of the factory, let alone produced goods there. However, under pressure, Wal-Mart vice-president, Jay Allen, had to admit that Wal-Mart lied because they felt “defensive” about the sweatshop issue.

Alcoa. Can you imagine that Alcoa workers in Mexico, in the high-tech factories making auto parts for export to the U.S., live in dirt-floor cardboard huts and sell their blood twice a week in order to survive?

Harvard University. Women in Bangladesh are paid 1.6 cents for each \$17 Harvard cap they sew. Their wages come to just one-tenth of 1 percent of the retail price. U.S. custom records show that the cap is valued at \$1.23 when it enters the United States. Then Harvard marks it up 1,300 percent.

Nike. Nike workers in Indonesia earn \$4.76 a day, or a total of \$811 a year. Labor for a pair of basketball shoes that retail for \$149.50 costs Nike \$1.50, 1 percent of the retail price. Nike’s total revenue for 1997 was \$9.19 billion, with a profit of \$795.8 million. CEO Bill Knight’s fourth-quarter dividend earnings were \$80 million.

Disney in Bangladesh. Young women sewing Disney shirts are forced to work fifteen hours a day, seven days a week. They are paid five cents for each \$17.99 shirt they sew. They are beaten, punched, and slapped, denied maternity leave and benefits. When they reach twenty-five to thirty years of age, they are fired and replaced by younger girls. In a five-year period, Michael Eisner, the CEO of Disney, paid himself \$667 million, about \$63,000 an hour. A worker in Bangladesh, paid twelve cents an hour to sew Disney garments, would have to work 210 years to earn what Eisner does in one hour.

If only half of the above is true, it speaks terribly of how we as a nation (and I assume also other developed nations) exploit the poor in our global family. I assume that most of the CEO’s and the people who are the Board of Directors of such companies believe in God and are good people in many ways. But one wonders if they ever think that they will have to give an account of their stewardship for their actions in poor countries.

As a result of so much labor going to poor countries, Vincent Gallagher tells us the following are a list of products that come to us from undeveloped nations:

- 83 percent of all clothing purchased in the U.S. is made in poor countries.
- 95 percent of shoes, sneakers, sporting goods, and computers are made in poor countries (\$170 billion each year).
- 80 percent of toys are made in China (\$29.4 billion each year).
- 100 percent of all televisions sold in the United States are produced in poor countries.
- 80 percent of all electronics are made in poor countries.

All of the above gives us all much food for thought on this Sunday when we reflect on the parable of the Rich Man and the Poor Man.

As a Church

As a church in the wealthiest nation in the world, we also sit in the chair of Dives or the Rich Man when we place ourselves in our global family. Having visited our Sister Diocese in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica and Peru, I have some sense of how little material resources they have to carry forward the Gospel of Christ. Parishes in the poor countries are also Lazarus sitting at our door step. It would be easy for us to say to them: “we really want to help you, but we have so many needs of our own, we really can’t pay our bills.” But such an attitude would make us no better than the Rich Man in today’s Gospel. Such an attitude would bring us the harsh condemnation that the rich Man received in today’s Gospel.

Parish Tithe

As most of you know we as a parish are moving closer and closer to setting aside 10% of our offertory income to help the poor at home and abroad. This year that figure will be \$112, 500 which is 7½ %. This past week we gave \$10,000 towards a project in Haiti, which is overseen by Jim and Mary Ann Loafman, members of Holy Name of Jesus. When they retired several years ago, they decided to give a good deal of their time and talent to helping the poor in Haiti. They now spend about four months of the year in Haiti overseeing various projects.

Our Local Outreach Ministries

Most of you are aware of the many opportunities we have locally to be involved with reaching out to the poor. Thrift Shop, social Concerns, Daily Bread, Habitat, Master Workshop (for more information on this ministry to poor unprivileged children, contact Fernando Dominicis through our parish office). Gift of Water is a ministry to the poor in Haiti and Jamaica.

Individually

No one nation, church or individual can remove all the poverty in our world, but each of us can do our bit, each of us can light a candle to dispel some of the darkness. We can do our bit by changing our own *attitude* or the *attitudes* of others towards the poor and by generously sharing a portion of our time, treasure and talent.

What can we do individually?

The following are some suggestions you may have other which I would love to hear about.

- Adopt more and more the *mindset of a steward* towards all that we possess. When we begin to see ourselves as owning nothing, but as the manager of God's assets to us, we will most likely approach all of life with a different mindset.
- Become informed about the issue of wealth and poverty. Take time to read *The True Cost of Low Prices*. Copies are available at the parish office \$5 or through Amazon.com. Become informed about *Fair Trade*—an organization that seeks to educate us about some of the issues talked about in the above book and an organization that seeks to obtain a fair and just price for the products produced by the poor.
- Plan to attend our *Fair Trade* Event November 17 & 18, which will be hosted by our *JustFaith* community. We will have products from 17 countries. Consider doing your Christmas shopping through *Fair Trade* outlets. Example

Equal Exchange, a worker-owned co-op
www.equalexchange.com

No Sweat Apparel—sale of union made and sweat shop free casual clothier. www.nosweatapparel.com

Ten Thousand Villages with retail outlets in 34 states
www.tenthousandvillages.org

- Purchase the coffee from Guatemala that we sell once a month. This coffee is produced by 3 communities which Tim Kantz works with. Tim spoke at our church a year ago. When we buy this coffee, we know we are giving the producers a *fair and just* price for their product.
- Volunteer in one of the local outreach ministries to the poor.
- Share financial resources with agencies that help the poor to have a better life. Bring clothes and other stuff that you no longer use to the Thrift Store where it can be sold and the money used to help the poor.

- Parents can and should teach children and teenagers the important biblical concept of stewardship. Teach them from an early age to share their time, treasure and talent with the church and the poor. As a family bring food items to church next Sunday for the poor.

Include the poor in your Last Will and Testament. Let your Will be a *Testament* to your concern for the poor. If you have already made your Will, revisit it with the mindset of a Christian Steward. For most of us our Last Will will be our best opportunity to make a significant gift to one or more agencies that are seeking to help the poor. If you have already made you Will, are you happy with the slice of it that will go to the poor?

When you look at human suffering concretely you destroy all innocence, all neutrality, every attempt to say, 'It wasn't I; there was nothing I could do; I didn't know.' In the face of suffering you are either with the victim or the executioner - there is no other option.
Dorothy Soelle

The rich man did nothing to Lazarus, but he was not innocent. There are times when our innocence is our crime.
Fr. Dennis McBride

Have a blessed week,

